

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY BY AVRAHAM SHIFRIN BEFORE THE SENATE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1973

The following statement will not be given by Mr. Shifrin, who will testify extemporaneously. However, it does represent an accurate summary of his testimony, with a few of the highlights spelled out in detail.7

Permit me to begin my testimony by saying how honored I am to be given the privilege of speaking here about my experiences during the 10 years of my imprisonment in Soviet concentration camps and prisons, and about the information I have received from many different sources inside the Soviet Union - and even from inside the camps - concerning conditions in the Soviet concentration camp empire today.

I am a proud Zionist, and, of course, I am very deeply concerned with the plight of the Jews in the Soviet Union, but as a human being I feel it my duty to speak here on behalf of all the prisoners, regardless of their nationality or religion. All nationalities are represented in the Soviet concentration camps. In fact, the camps are the only place in the USSR where there is no discrimination.

I also want to ask my friends in Soviet captivity to forgive me for not mentioning them all by name here in the Senate of the United States. Hundreds of prisoners whom I know personally are today on the other side of the barb-wire fence. They occupy the same concrete bunks on which I used to spend sleepless nights in the camp barracks. They eat rotten cabbage, and with bare hands they build industrial ^{and} plants /electric power station dams and fell timber in the wild forests and in the Arctic.

I was amazed to discover when I left the Soviet Union in 1970 that most people in the free world - even well-informed people - appear to believe that the massive concentration camp system which existed in Stalin's day has for all practical purposes been abolished in the U.S.S.R. At the height of the Stalin terror, according to Khrushchev's statement of 1956, there were 15 million prisoners in the camps of the U.S.S.R. It is true that after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 he did order the release of many millions of political prisoners - and this unquestionably does have a good deal to do with the confusion that exists in the free world. I myself saw how the camps over a period of a few years were emptied of almost half of their population. But I also saw in the period immediately following the suppression of the Hungarian revolution how the camps rapidly filled

up again to capacity with soldiers, officers, workers, intellectuals, but mostly with professors, students, and young people.

Today the concentration camps house far fewer people than they did during the peak years of Stalin's terror. But the sad fact is - and I shall document this in the course of my testimony - that there are millions of prisoners in the concentration camps and prisons of the Soviet Union today; that the camps, far from having disappeared, number into the thousands; and that the conditions are just as bestial as they were in the days of Stalin.

I want to make it clear that I am not speaking about 1953. I am not even speaking about 1963, when I was released. I am speaking about today.

That conditions in Soviet concentration camps have changed little since the times of Stalin is evidenced by numerous letters received by Alexander Solzhenitsyn after the publication of his novel One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich. Excerpts from these letters were released by Solzhenitsyn and published in the collection of his works (v. 5, Possev, West Germany, 1969). In general, these letters said that conditions were very much the same, or that they were even worse than those described by Solzhenitsyn.

A group of prisoners of the Ust-Nera camp, for example,

wrote: "Our conditions now are much worse (worse than those described in your novel). We are not being beaten, but soldiers say that we should all be done away with. Where does such hatred come from in boys 18-20 years old? They are obviously being incited...In December 1962 when the novel was published out of a total of 300 prisoners in our zone, 190 of us were suffering from scurvey."

Here you see a map of the USSR. The red flags stand for concentration camps. The blue flags indicate entire complexes of camps. There may be a hundred camps or more in a single complex, each camp housing 2,000 to 5,000 prisoners. There are millions of prisoners in Soviet punitive institutions today. In Moscow alone, tourists could find 27 huge prisons, had they made an effort to see them instead of the "Swan Lake" in the Bolshoi Theater Ballet. (See map)

I am unable to show you all the camps on this map. There simply is no room to stick in the flags. Around each big Soviet city you will find three to five concentration camps. In Odessa, a city which the tourists love so much, there is a huge concentration camp with towers and barbed-wire fencing, right in the center of the town, on Chernomorskaya Doroga.

Here, for example, is Orsha, a minor provincial city, not even marked on the map. Yet, it is surrounded by six concentration camps. Here are their addresses:

P. O. Box	UZh	15/6	- "B"
"	"	15/2	- "V"
"	"	15/12	
"	"	15/12	- 1
"	"	15/12	- "E"
"	"	15/12	- "Zh"

This is a situation that should be of profound concern to the entire free world. It should be of concern, first, on moral and humanitarian grounds. But beyond this, the existence of this massive concentration system poses a serious danger to the security of the Free World. To the extent that the men in the Kremlin are able to repress all dissident opinion and all restraining voices, they are freer to engage in subversion and blackmail and expansion abroad.

I feel it to be my moral duty to tell you about the new wave of arrests in the Soviet Union, about starvation in concentration camps and prisons, about the mortal danger to which sick prisoners -- like Silva Zalmanson, Eduard Kuznetsov, and Anatoli Altman -- are exposed there. Remember the conditions under which Yuri Galanskov died only a few weeks ago. His friends had appealed to the free world time and again. They warned how gravely ill Galanskov was, but nobody seemed to have listened to them.

My memories of the camps consist of a succession of nightmares.

Today in Soviet concentration camps you can see hundreds of thousands of women, including mothers with babies. They are being held in special subdivisions. Once in Potma in 1961, I saw some 200 or 250 women with babies in their hands, children screaming, women crying, guards cursing, dogs barking. Revolted and outraged we began to shout at the guards: "Fascists!" "Murderers!" There were about three thousand of us, being moved by cattle-car to a transit camp. The guards panicked and began to shoot in the air. And suddenly in the midst of this pandemonium we heard the metallic voice of the radio announcer, amplified by the loudspeakers: "Citizens, rejoice. The Soviet Union has scored another great victory: a rocket with Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin on board has been launched into space!"

Thousands and thousands of men and women languish in concentration camps because of their faith in God. The Communists want to destroy all confessional groups, all religions. * The believers cannot pray, they are denied the opportunity to observe religious holidays. The guards deride them, molest them, and throw them into punitive cells whenever they catch them praying. In the Tayshet Camp No. 10 in Siberia, I have witnessed the following scene. One Sunday the guards decided to break up a prayer meeting of Russian Orthodox nuns, so they

* I wish to remind you of such martyrs as Boris Talantov, Anatoly Krasnov, Levitin, Fichalko, and many other nameless victims - Christians, Jews and Moslems.

ordered them to go to the shower-room to wash. The nuns asked that they be permitted to take their baths on Monday, because they did not wish to violate their Sabbath, but the guards refused. They tore the clothes off the women, and dragged them, naked, by their legs through the snow to the shower.

In the concentration camp of Kenigirin/Kazakhstan about 500 women were run over by tanks, when they formed a line in order to protect the male prisoners whom the guards were trying to punish for staging a riot. This incident took place after the prisoners had stopped their work in the mines and gone on a hunger strike to protest against the unbearable conditions in the camp. And the conditions were such that some prisoners in desperation opened their veins, inflicted wounds on themselves, swallowed spoons and nails, drank their own blood and ate their own flesh. Yes, understand me correctly, their own flesh, driven to a state of delirium by hunger.

In the Potma Camp No. 10 I saw a prisoner, Nikolai Shcherbakov, cut off his own ears and throw them into the face of the camp officer. When I asked him later why he did it, he answered: "When I am free some day, I'll tell them of the horrors of our life here, and they may not believe me. So I'll show them my earless head and the inscription tatooed on my forehead: 'Slave of Communism.' That should convince them!"

The brutality and Sadism of the concentration camp guards -- to which I will refer later in my testimony -- partly results from the KGB instructions. But in part it is due to the initiative of officers and soldiers who have been completely dehumanized by their work. When you see a guard crushing the skull of a dead prisoner or plunging a red-hot iron into a corpse to ascertain that the man is really dead, then he is following instructions. But when -- as I have seen in the wild forest near Lake Baykal -- the KGB soldiers tie a naked prisoner to a tree and leave him there to be devoured by swarms of poisonous gnats, they act on their own initiative, because the government encourages them to be brutal *and their occupation has dehumanized them.* When the prisoners are made to eat rotten cabbage, and sleep on concrete bunks in cells covered by a thick layer of frost - these are Moscow instructions. But when the guards throw the corpses of dead prisoners out on the snow to be devoured by wild beasts in the forest, then it is the guards' initiative.

All these awful things you can see now, today, in the thousands of concentration camps and prisons of the Soviet Union. But the people in the Soviet Union resist, they struggle, they are not broken. They refuse to permit the communists to destroy God's image in their souls, to corrupt them and turn them into beasts, or into robots.

Numerous underground groups and movements are springing up all over the Soviet Union. Many hundreds of freedom fighters have been arrested, and sent to jails and concentration camps for up to 15 years. We must remember the names of these heroes:

The civil rights movement in the Soviet Union goes back to before the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Among the early heroes of this resistance, I note particularly the names of Eduard Kouznetsov, Ilya Bokshstein, Igor Avdeev, ^{Viktor Khaustov} and Yuri Osipov. They began their resistance with the public readings of poetry in Mayakowsky Square. First they read the poems of Mayakowsky. Then they began to read some of their own poetry that contained criticisms of the Soviet regime. Then Bokshstein one day climbed up on the statute of Mayakowsky and delivered a passionate oration against Soviet tyranny. A battle ensued with the secret police, and scores of those who took part in the demonstration were arrested and imprisoned.

Since that time there have been many similar public protests in the Soviet Union -- some of them inspired by the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, some of them inspired by the desire for more freedom and hatred of the regime of oppression, some of them inspired at least in part by the recurring food shortages. In every case the answer of the regime has been more arrests and more repression. Over the

the past 16 or 17 years in the Soviet Union there have been riots and even major clashes in a whole series of Soviet cities, including Ryazan, Timyr Tau, Krasnodar, Vladivostok, and Novocherkask. Only half a year ago there was a major riot in which many people were killed in the city of Dniepro-dzherzinsk, on the river Dnieper.

Intellectuals like Galanskov and Ginzburg tried during this period to publish an underground magazine. The Samizdat movement became nationwide - thousands of people participating in the laborious copying of documents of opposition. The Chronicle of Current Events, chief of the Samizdat publications, began to come out on a regular basis -- and despite frantic efforts on the part of the regime it continues to come out until this day. A Jewish underground chronicle, Exodus, also began to appear on a regular basis. Entire books, like Marchenko's "My Testimony," were circulated in Samizdat form.

There were many casualties in this unrelenting battle for freedom -- men and women whose names are justly honored throughout the world. Among the best known of these martyrs for freedom were Sinyavsky and Daniel, Pavl Litvinov, General Grigorenko, Anatoli Marchenko, Victor Krasnov and Victor Feinberg. All of these men are still in prison.

I would like to pay special tribute here to two young

men who have paid an incredibly high price for their defiance of the Soviet regime - Pyotr Yakir, the son of a Jewish General who was executed by Stalin, and Yuri Shoukhevich, the son of a Ukrainian insurgent General who was also executed by Stalin. Both of these, remarkably enough, were first sent to the concentration camps at the age of 14 as sons of the "enemies of the people," both were released after serving 20 years; both resumed the battle for freedom immediately on their release. And both are now back in prison.

I must also say a few words about Vladimir BUKOVSKY. He was one of the initiators of the Russian democratic opposition. Out of 30 years of his life, 9 were spent in psychiatric prisons and concentration camps. In January 1972 he was sentenced to a total of 12 years for having sent to the West a collection of documents concerning the confinement of healthy dissenters to special psychiatric institutions. These documents together with other materials were released by this Subcommittee on December 4, 1972.

Igor OGURTSOV, Mikhail SADO, Yevgeni VAGIN, and Boris AVEROCHKIN, leaders of the All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People, and some sixty of their followers were arrested in Leningrad, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Petrozavodsk, and other cities, because their patriotic appeal for the revival of Russia's spiritual and religious values did not fit into the pattern of the Communist-sponsored

policy of "Russification."

Also arrested during '71 and '72 were

/Vyacheslav CHERNOVIL, Valentin MOROZ, Ivan DZYUBA,

Svyatoslav KARAVANSKY and scores and scores of other Ukrainian nationalists who resisted the ruthless "Russification" campaign unleashed by the Kremlin leaders who want to divide and rule. When riots broke out in Novocheskask and Dneprodzerzhinsk the Communists suppressed it with the hands of the Uzbeks - but in Tashkent they used Ukrainians to crush the rioting Uzbeks.

Victor KALNINSH, Juozas ZDEBKIS, Willi SAARTE and many Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian patriots strove for the independence of their nations. Rollan KADYEV, Reshat BAIRAMOV and other Crimean Tartars who demanded the right for their people to return to their native land. More than 500,000 Crimean Tartars were deported to Siberia at Stalin's orders and are still denied the right to return home by the present government.

Navy Captain Gennady GAVRILOV and scores of his friends were arrested in Leningrad, Moscow, Tallin, Riga, Baku, Perm, and Khabarovsk in connection with the conspiracy of the Baltic Fleet officers. These are just a few examples.

It is with pride that I come now to the struggle of the Jewish people. In November 1972, Grisha BERMAN went to the draft board in Odessa and declared that he refused to serve

in the Red Army because in his heart he felt himself a citizen of Israel. He got a three year sentence. A three year sentence was also imposed on Vladimir MARKMAN just for a few telephone conversations with friends in Israel. But all this does not intimidate the Soviet Jews. I wish to mention here the names of such heroes as Eduard KUZNETSOV, Silva ZALMANSON, Anatoli ALTMAN, and their friends who tried to fly secretly to Israel because the government of tyrants stubbornly refused to permit them to emigrate legally. Today they languish in the Potma concentration camp No. 10 -- the most horrible of all in the Soviet Union -- locked up for 15 years.

And now let me voice a note of warning. The cancer of Communism has now spread over half of Europe, China, Cuba, and parts of Africa. The Communists try to destroy your society with the help of all those radical groups. They deceive your youth with propaganda; they try to demoralize you so that they can seize power in your country. And don't think that I am spreading panic. Remember that there was a time when there was no Communism in Eastern Europe or in Cuba, and the red flags were not exposed so boldly in France and Italy. In the Soviet Union, Communists try to eradicate all dissidents, all democratic elements. They lock people up only because they dare to think. All this spells danger to

you: The more they consolidate their power internally, the greater is the threat to the free countries.

That is the reason why I am here today. I want to remind you of our responsibility to those who are oppressed. They need our help. How can we help them? We can help them in two way: first, by exposing the facts; and second, by voicing our indignation.

In helping them we shall also be helping ourselves.

QUESTIONNAIRE

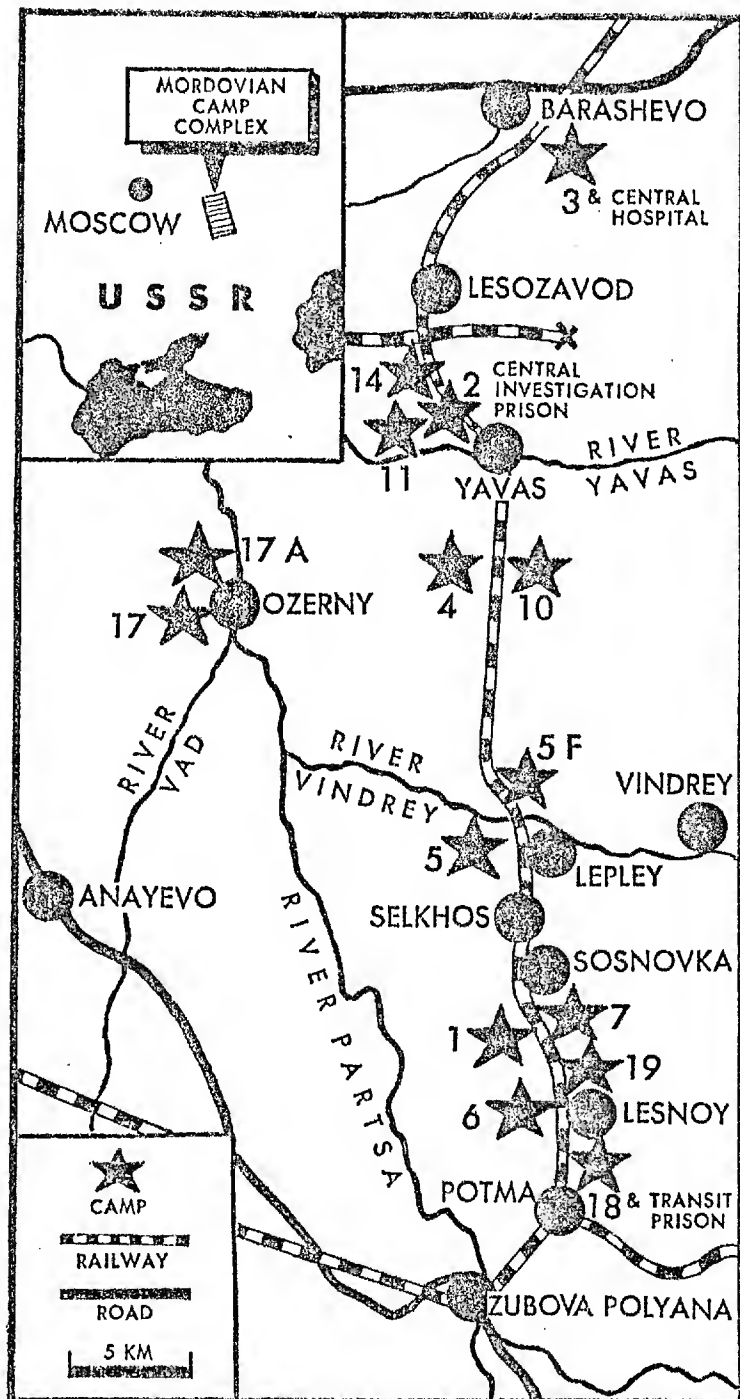
MAOZ (Fortress)

Tel Aviv
P.O. Box 14091
Israel

1. Given name, patronymic, last name:
2. Age:
3. Education:
4. Date of arrival:
5. Place of departure and domicile in the USSR:
6. Have you taken part in the Zionist Movement, where and when?
7. Were you ever arrested?
8. Did you personally know anyone among the political prisoners in the USSR?
9. Do you know any relatives of Soviet political prisoners? (Please give their addresses, so that help could be offered them)
10. Do you know of anyone who has applied for an exit visa to Israel? (Please furnish the addresses)
11. Do you know any persons in the USSR who need assistance because they have lost their jobs as a result of their Zionist work, or because they have applied for emigration to Israel? (Please furnish the addresses)
12. Do you know anyone in the USSR who is interested in receiving Samizdat literature? (Please give the addresses to whom such materials should be sent)
13. Have you heard of any new arrests? (Please give addresses of the prisoners and their relatives to enable us to assist them)
14. Do you know of any political prisoners incarcerated in camps for criminal prisoners? (please give the addresses of the camps and the prisoner's families to enable us to assist them)
15. If you were an eyewitness of riots, demonstrations or executions, please give details:
16. Did you know any members of the democratic or religious groups? Have you established a working contact with them? What kind of assistance do they need?
17. Where were you employed? Have you been confronted with any form of anti-Semitism at work?
18. What was the attitude of your colleagues towards the Soviet government?
19. What kind of political rumours have you heard?
20. What new political anecdotes have you heard?
21. Have you been listening to foreign broadcasts? What reactions? How good was audibility?

22. What themes and subjects, in your opinion, should be discussed in foreign radio broadcasts?
23. Do you know any person who has refused to serve in the Soviet armed forces?
24. Do you know any person who has renounced his Soviet citizenship?
25. Were there any concentration camps around your city or in any other localities you have visited? (addresses)
26. What do you know about Birchidation?
27. What do you know about the life conditions of the political exiles?
28. What suggestions could you make to assist those who struggle for freedom and for their right to emigrate to Israel?
29. What do you suggest should be done in order to bring about the release of political prisoners in the USSR?
30. Are there any statements you wish to make with regard to the USSR and the conditions of life in that country?
31. Would you care to comment on the nature of this questionnaire and how it should be improved?

Attention, World!



THE KGB'S PRIVATE RAILROAD

Map was presented in testimony by Avraham Shifrin before the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security, February 1, 1973.

The railroad running from Potma to Barashevo which is depicted on the above map (a small segment of the concentration camp map of the Soviet Union!) does not appear on any official map of the Soviet Union. It is a railroad run by the KGB for the purpose of servicing the numerous concentration camps on both sides of the track. It runs north from Potma, on the Moscow-Saransk-Kuybishev line, for a distance of some 70 kms.

During his 10-year confinement: (1953-63) Avraham Shifrin spent time in a number of the camps and prisons shown in the above map. They are still there today and the conditions remain very much the same. Alexander Krimgold, an Israeli citizen who visited the Potma complex in July of 1971, described it thus in a recent letter to Shifrin: "A narrow gauge railroad, on both sides of which, like so many boils, lie scattered the terrible labor camps of Mordovia, runs deep into the forest from the main junction. . . Potma is a fearful place which readily evokes Nazi concentration camps. Barbed wire fences, watchtowers, dogs set in pursuit of people. . . These camps are the worthy heirs of Hitler's and Stalin's work."